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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses issues related to the training and provision of interpreters for deaf students at institutions of higher education in the United Kingdom. Background information provided notes the increasing numbers of deaf and partially hearing students, the existence of funding to pay for interpreters, and trends in the availability of interpreters. Financial support through the Disabled Students Allowance is discussed as are concerns about this allowance including eligibility, means-testing, special problems of students with multiple disabilities, and payment methods. Establishment by some universities of special support services for deaf students is noted. A survey of 46 deaf students at the University of Bristol (England) is summarized for type of secondary school attended, communication mode preferred, communication mode in their previous school, and support needs. The survey found that none of the students had used interpreters in elementary/secondary education settings. A final section reviews trends in training and qualifying interpreters for the deaf. Other issues considered include social implications of interpreter use, the university experience, and alternatives to interpreting in the higher education setting. (DB)

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ED 391 293

Higher education interpreting

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One area in educational sign language interpreting which presents its own special problems and requirements is that of interpreting within higher education settings. This paper discusses issues related to the training and provision of interpreters in higher education in the United Kingdom. Higher education interpreting is required in three settings: 1) with deaf students integrated across a wide range of departments across all faculties of the university; 2) with deaf students taking programmes of study specifically for deaf students (for example, training as teachers of sign language); and 3) with hearing students taking courses taught by deaf members of staff using sign language as a teaching medium.

1 BACKGROUND TO HIGHER EDUCATION INTERPRETING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

In 1980 a review by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People found that only 6 male students had enrolled on university courses between 1850 and 1950. In contrast, by 1991, the population of deaf and partially hearing students in higher education at any one time was about 250. The national application form for entry to higher education was modified in 1993 so that applicants could declare themselves as having one or more disabilities. Data collected in a Birmingham University study of applications from students declaring disabilities indicated that 885 had declared deafness/hearing impairment . Of these, 403 had been accepted for Higher Education (45.2%) and 482 had been rejected. Thus, assuming that those offered places take them up, that the percentage of those offered places has remained constant, and that most students take up a 3-year degree programme, there will be an estimated 1200 deaf and hearing impaired students in universities in the United Kingdom by autumn 1995. Undoubtedly the main reason for the rapid increase in the deaf and partially hearing student population has been the introduction of new Disabled Students Allowances in 1991 (Green & Nickerson 1992). Indeed, the two main factors creating higher education opportunities for deaf and partially-hearing students in the United Kingdom have been the existence of funding to pay for interpreters and other support needs, and the availability of interpreters.

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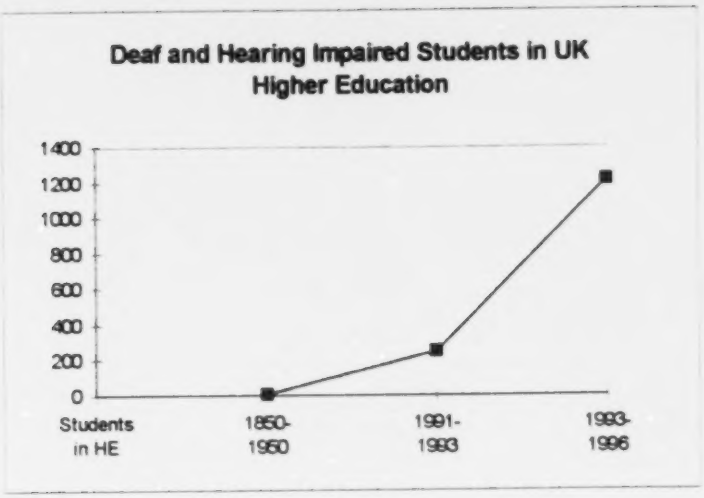


2. ALLOWANCES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Before 1991 students were eligible to apply for an annual allowance of £750 ($1200) to spend on whatever resource they felt most appropriate. As the hourly rates for interpreters were, even at that time, around £7 ($11) per hour, this would only purchase 107 hours per annum, or 3 1/2 hours per week of the academic year. This of course would be entirely insufficient to support a student through his studies. With the introduction of the revised scheme the allowances were substantially increased. Not only was the maximum for the old general Disabled Students Allowance raised to £1000 ($1600) per annum but two new grants were included for the first time. Technical aids could now be purchased up to the value of £3000 ($4800) as a one-off payment for the duration of the course. This meant that radio hearing aids, computers and textphones came within the scope of the student grant. The most significant new grant to be introduced was that for the employment of 'Non-medical helpers'. A maximum sum of £4000 ($6400) per annum was made available for disabled students to pay for any personal assistance needed. For deaf students, this allowance could be used, for example, to pay for interpreters, lip-speakers or note-takers. The allowances were index-linked and stand (for the academic year 1995-1996) at £1215 ($1944) for the general allowance, £3650 - equivalent to £1216 per year ($1946) for the one-off equipment allowance, and £4850 ($7760) for the non-medical helpers allowance.

The new Disabled Students Allowances were introduced at the same time as, and funded by, changes in financing for students at university which replaced the previous student grant system (which paid for students' living costs) with a reduced grant combined with student loans. The grant element has continued to decrease since 1990 and now stands at just over £1800. In contrast, as mentioned above, the Disabled Students Allowance has been linked to the cost-of-living index, and thus has risen since its introduction.

3. DRAWBACKS TO THE DISABLED STUDENTS ALLOWANCE

a. Eligibility

Although the provision of substantial finance for students via the Disabled Students Allowance is most welcome, there are several important drawbacks to the scheme. The first is that the Disabled Students Allowance is dependent on the student being eligible for a mandatory grant. This means that students taking standard degree courses are eligible to apply for the allowance but that part-time or sub-degree level students still have to finance their own support. Post-graduate students are also not eligible, although some funding is available to those individuals receiving postgraduate funding from government-funded Research Council studentships.

b. Means-testing

The second drawback is that the grants are means-tested. The means-testing works in the same way as ordinary grants. Students are awarded payments on a sliding scale according to their own, or their parents', income and savings. In practice, few parents are actually obliged to pay for the full allowances. However, means-testing does extend disabled students' reliance on parental support in comparison to students without disabilities.

The two conditions of means testing and of registration on full-time degree courses are both problems. Many deaf students would be best placed to enter Higher Education as mature students through part-time and access courses. Means-testing is yet another burden. Deaf students and their parents, no matter what their financial circumstances, should not be penalised because of disability.

c. Multiple disabilities

A third problem is the support needs of students with more than one disability. There is no provision for increasing the total amount to cover their additional requirements. This creates problems, for example, for students with Usher's Syndrome, who may need substantial equipment as well as human support.

d. Payment of allowances

The method of payment of the allowance can also cause problems. Perhaps not surprisingly, the conservative government in Britain views the student as a 'consumer', and provision is consumer-based. Funding is directed entirely to the student, and the student is formally responsible for organising his or her own support needs. While this is appealing in theory, placing the student at the centre, in practice the student is required not only to estimate her own support needs but also to become familiar with advertising, interviewing, salary and insurance payments and may other aspects of becoming an employer. By purchasing individual support, the student cannot take advantage of 'bulk' discounts which a large organisation purchasing support may be able to negotiate. Many students, hearing and deaf, have enough trouble managing their own living expense money without having to make payments for their communication support.

e. Other support needs

The other problem relates to the lack of recognition by the system of non-individual and other non-qualifying support needs. These include, for example, installations such as loops in lecture theatres, visual alarm systems, and other equipment such as spare radio aids and department textphones; services such as specialist deaf student counselling; deaf awareness training for hearing staff and students; and advice at the application and admissions stage. Because there is no infra-structure funding, those universities which provide no support services end up financially better-off than those with substantial numbers of deaf students

4. ESTABLISHMENT OF UNIVERSITY SUPPORT SERVICES

Recognition by some universities of these problems has led a small number of institutions (despite the additional costs) to establish support services for deaf students. These can assist in providing students with information on technical equipment currently available, assessing support needs and sending this information to the Local Education Authority (which is responsible for administering the Disabled Students Allowance). They can further assist by organising and booking interpreters and other communication support staff. Finding appropriate interpreters is often difficult because of the general shortage of interpreters. It is clear that if deaf students in Higher Education are to fully benefit from the education which is offered then comprehensive support service needs to be established (Porcari Li Destri 1994; Porcari Li Destri & Pizzuto 1995)

One such support service, the Access for Deaf Students Initiative, was established at the University of Bristol in 1991 with the aim of providing deaf and partially-hearing students with individually-designed support, not only for the academic part of their studies, but also to support the wider experience of university. Staffing includes the Director, Administrator, Student Counsellor (who is deaf himself), technician, and Support Services Co-ordinator (responsible for booking interpreters and other communication support staff). The Access for Deaf Students Initiative is currently undertaking a study as part of its continuing research programme, supported by the Higher Education Funding Council of England (the government body which administers university funding) and the findings of this study will be reported here.

5. DEAF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In April 1995 a postal questionnaire was sent to all applicants to the University of Bristol since 1991 who had indicated a hearing impairment on their application form, and to all deaf and partially hearing students currently at Bristol. The table below provides some information on the characteristics of the sample (n=46), which may be regarded as representative of deaf and partially-hearing university applicants.

BACKGROUND DATA ON SAMPLE

TYPE OF SCHOOL

Mainstream/PHU	36	78%
Deaf school/ PHU/Mainstream	10	22%

COMMUNICATION PREFERRED

English dominant	30	65%
Sign dominant	5	11%
Mixed	11	24%

COMMUNICATION IN SCHOOL

English	45	98%
English and Sign	1	2%

COMMUNICATION SUPPORT IN SCHOOL

None	23	50%
Teacher	22	48%
Interpreter	0	
No response	1	2%

a. Type of school

The majority of respondents had been integrated in mainstream schools, either individually or in classes for deaf and partially hearing children. The remaining 22% had attended schools for the deaf for at least part of their education.

b. Communication Preferred

This question asked about the students' current preferred means of communication. Many respondents mentioned more than one means of communication. Nearly two-thirds reported that they preferred English. The sign-dominant group preferred British Sign Language, while the mixed group reported that they would use both British Sign Language and English or Signed English. It should be noted that many of those who preferred BSL had been educated in mainstream settings and as can be seen from the responses below, no signing had been used in their education.

c. Communication in School

This question asked them to describe the communication used within the classroom when they were at school. Only one respondent reported that signing had been used, a not-surprising finding in terms of the communication policies in use at the time they were school pupils. It is interesting to note that despite the non-availability of signing in the classroom, 1/3 now reported that they either preferred Sign or used both Sign and English.

d. Communication support in School

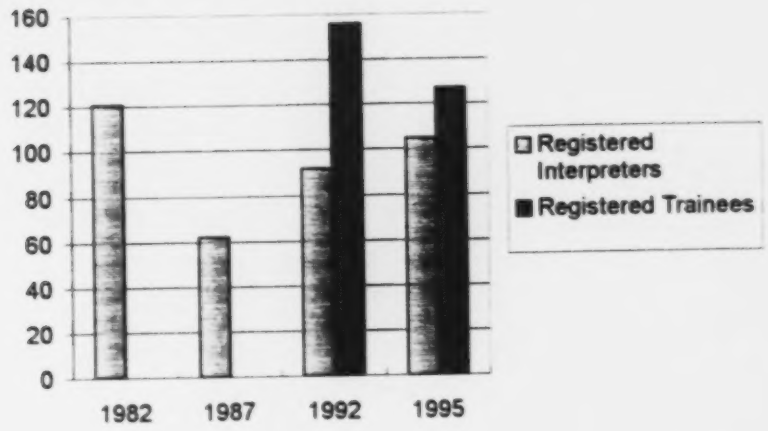
Half of the sample had had no communication support while at school. All of the remaining respondents who replied to this question reported that they had received communication support from a teacher of the deaf. None had used interpreters while at school. This issue will be returned to later as it has important implications for students' use of interpreters in higher education.

6. INTERPRETERS

A brief history of, and snapshot of the current situation regarding interpreters in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will serve to place the discussion of higher education interpreting in context. The original Register of Interpreters for the Deaf, set up in 1982, comprised 121 people, 112 of whom were given honorary membership for an initial 5-year period. The honorary members had all previously qualified as welfare workers with the deaf. The remaining nine members had undertaken a short course of training and an examination.

The entrance examination set up in 1982 comprised an assessment in sign communication skills and in interpreting skills. Successful candidates were awarded simultaneously an advanced level certificate in signing skills and membership of the Register of Interpreters for the Deaf. In 1986, it was decided to separate language assessment from training and examination as an interpreter. This occurred in recognition of the need for interpreter training to be undertaken only by those already fluent in sign language, and that interpreting and language fluency skills were different. After the separation of language training from interpreter training, new interpreter training courses began to spring up. These were initially very short (2 weeks contact time, followed by supervised practicums and private study). Towards the end of the 1980s, interpreter training courses began to be developed at higher education level. In 1989 the University of Bristol established a part-time post-graduate certificate course, which has now been replaced by a two-year undergraduate programme. Durham University introduced a part-time programme leading to a Diploma/MA, and Wolverhampton offers a specialisation in interpreting to students majoring in Deaf Studies. There are still a number of short training programmes, for example those organised by the RNID, and current developments are in the direction of in-service training which would lead to national vocational qualifications.

The increase in training programmes has accompanied the rapid increase in demand for good quality interpreters. Although demand has risen enormously, the increase in the supply of Registered Qualified Interpreters is still limited. The majority of the original honorary Register of Interpreters for the Deaf members did not take the examination when the honorary period expired. As a result, numbers dropped from 121 to 62. In 1992, to help alleviate the shortage, it was agreed to include on the register all those holders of advanced language skills certificates who were either undertaking training or who were prepared to declare that they would begin training within 3 years. The number of registered interpreters in 1992 was 92 and registered trainees 156. By 1995, as had happened with the first honorary register members in 1987, a large number of trainees had dropped out of the register. As of July 1995, the total number on the register stands at 127 trainees and 105 qualified interpreters.



The picture thus presented is worrying. The study revealed that about 1/3 of hearing-impaired students need interpreters. There are insufficient numbers of interpreters to meet the increased need in absolute numbers, and perhaps even more worrying, general training does not necessarily produce interpreters with appropriate skills for Higher Education, as the quote below from one of the respondents in the HEFCE study indicates. This student's comment sums up the main issues relating to language skills for interpreters in Higher Education:

> *In my experience, I do not find interpreters very useful, unless they have a good knowledge of the subjects they are interpreting for. I am having problems with my interpreters because they have no knowledge, e.g. for biology, so therefore either I am confused or lost. it is important to have an experienced interpreter with a good educational background because at degree level it is not easy to translate information if an interpreter doesn't know what it is about!*

Until numbers of interpreters increase, and training takes into sufficient account the need for high level English language skills and special subject area knowledge, it is unlikely that students will receive an adequate service, with appropriate choice of interpreter.

7. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF INTERPRETER USE AND THE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

Interpreting, and for that matter, any other service provided, should be seen in the over-all context of the university experience. In Britain, where most students do not study from home, attending a university has both social and academic importance in young people's development. Because students do not use interpreters at school, or where an interpreting function is performed, it is usually undertaken by a teacher, who has different responsibilities in relation to the pupil's success than a Higher Education interpreter would, students need training in interpreter use when they enter higher education. Such training should include understanding of the role and function of the interpreter vis-à-vis the student and the lecturer, preparation of technical vocabulary (in both BSL and English), techniques for participating in lectures, seminars and group discussions, etc. To our knowledge, no such comprehensive training is available to students in higher education or to interpreters who work in the sector. Other contexts in which students may be using interpreters for the first time, such as medical settings, may also need preparation by the interpreter and sensitivity to the needs and attitudes of young people.

8. ALTERNATIVES TO NTERPRETING IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SETTING

At the time of application, and during their initial period at the University of Bristol, students are introduced to a range of possible communication support services and technology. As mentioned above, most have had limited exposure to different types of communication support at school. In manycases, students' initial preferences are modified as they progress through their studies. In particular, they are introduced to Hi-Linc, a computer-based speech-to-text system, in which two lap-top computers are linked together, with an operator who transcribes a summary of the lecture in real-time. At the same time, the student reads on his or her own laptop the output of the system. At the end of the lecture, the transcribed script is saved to floppy disc for the student to use as notes. The system has several advantages: it uses standard PCs with a normal keyboard, there are no translation issues, the typist requires no specialist skills, the studen can look away from the screen to make separate notes and still find the text on-screen when he looks back to the monitor, and the full lecture notes are available immediately at the end of the lecture for editing and adding-to by the student. A number of students use this system for lectures, while using an interpreter for smaller group discussions. As one student said:

> *Lectures usually last for 3 hours - it is very tiring for me and my eyes, not forgetting the interpreter too - breaks during lectures should be built-in. Hi-Linc helps to reduce the stress of watching the interpreter all the time.* .

9. CONCLUSIONS

Higher Education interpreting has its own unique qualities and requirements. The major considerations for interpreters, students and institutions can be summarised as follows:

a) The need for sufficien numbers: of deaf students and interpreters

b) The need for specialis training: for students, staff, and interpreters

c) The organisation of service provision: the development of an effective and efficient system of matching interpreters with student needs, handling finances and timetables

d) The monitoring of quality: it is essential to monitor interpreting, in order to spot problems before the develop. Without such monitoring, it is often difficult to know if failing marks arise from a pure academic failure by the student, from problems with interpreters, from problems with the lecturers, or from a combination of these.

e) Funding of institutional infrastructure: the development and proper funding of the services described above

Deaf students in Higher Education are the deaf professionals of the future, and the likely leaders of the deaf community of tomorrow. Higher Education must provide the experience of support which will put the young deaf person on an equal basis of learning with his hearing peers.

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